

# *The Centenarian Spirit in Wisconsin*



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April 2000

**State of Wisconsin**

Department of Health and Family Services

Division of Supportive Living

Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources

PO Box 7851 Madison WI 53707-7851



# Lives Worth Celebrating!

Over the past 100 years, a generation of hard-working, civic-minded men and women applied their physical prowess, intellectual curiosity, artistic spirit and religious beliefs to form the modern state of Wisconsin. They were born in 1901 or earlier.

Younger people tend to treat all older people in the same way, to stereotype and patronize those who look frail or ancient. These cameos of the lives of people between the ages of 100 and 108 (and older) reveal the distinctive qualities of women and men who shaped and were shaped by the 20th century. Some of the oldest people in Wisconsin reflect here on events as diverse as the arrival of electricity to a log cabin and the arrival of the French in Indochina. People reminisce about watching the White Sox or driving a Whippet in the 1920s. We are grateful to all these elders for sharing their memories, their humor, their poetry, parental pride, and patriotism.

The centenarians' stories as history alone are a valuable gift, but as we look around our state, we can see more tangible gifts that we take for granted.

We drive on the roads, harvest the cleared fields, fish in pristine waters, attend schools, worship in churches and temples, find healing in hospitals, seek justice in courtrooms, conduct space research, delight in music, and dwell in houses that **were built, created or preserved** by these forefathers and mothers. We flourish because of what they did and how they lived.

During the year 2000, we invite one and all to pay tribute to the hundreds of older people who have lived and worked here for an eventful 100 years. These survivors represent a generation that experienced and shaped the most amazing century in history. They made marriages that lasted and raised families in periods of extraordinary change and deprivation. They deserve our thanks and admiration for what they endured and what they accomplished. As their descendents and cultural heirs, we honor our fathers and mothers.

Beyond the centenarians' achievements, we are fascinated by their unprecedented longevity. Between the lines of their stories, we can find the secrets to long life.

These abbreviated entries feature only **some** Wisconsinites who have lived one hundred years. Through their voices and faces, we honor **all** of the oldest people who continue to contribute to Wisconsin's richness and vitality.

Celebrate the lives that shaped the century!

Donna McDowell, Director  
Bureau of Aging and Long Term Care Resources  
Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

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**Editor:** Florence Rosner, BALTCR

**Project Committee:**

Jennifer Keeley, Publication Design and Layout, BALTCR

Donna McDowell, Director, BALTCR

Barbara Robinson, Committee Chair, BALTCR

Judy Rank, Director, Manitowoc County Aging Resource Center

Carla Cady, Director, Columbia County Commission on Aging

Jayne Mullins, AgeAdvantage Area Agency on Aging

## Cover

Featured Centenarians:

1. Mark Johnson, Vilas County;
2. Cora Priest, Milwaukee County;
3. Eda Frank, Taylor County;
4. Mary Reynolds, Juneau County;
5. Bessie Kuhl, Rock County;
6. R. "Doc" Barnes, Clark County;
7. Bessie Jenness, Barron County;
8. Lafayette Conner, St Croix Tribe;
9. Mai Xiong, Brown County; and
10. Laura Pike, Kenosha County.

